by Kevin Savetz

Impact Software Microangelo 5.5

Microangelo 5.5
$59.99
Impact Software
www.impactsoft.com

If you're a software developer (or just like creating art on a very tiny canvas), you need to edit icons. Microangelo is a set of utilities for extracting, editing, and cataloging icons and cursors.

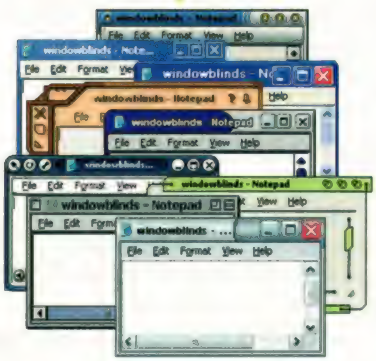
Microangelo's Studio app is a graphics editor for static icons and cursors that includes the usual line- and shape-drawing tools, brushes, and fill functions, plus other helpful tools for icon manipulation. The app's color locator helps quickly find all the pixels of a particular color in your nascent artwork, and the nudge arrows scoot icons around its tiny canvas. The Animator utility lets you create animated icons and cursors, and it sports a nearly identical interface to the Studio utility, which keeps the learning curve shallow.

If you lack the artistic ability to create icons from scratch, liberate them from other programs with the Explorer utility. Just point Explorer to any app or library and it will display the icons and cursors within it. From there, the editor is a click away. Impact Software's Web site also offers free icons, cursors, and Desktop themes for download or to import into your programs. Use them with care, as some, such as the Sesame Street and NFL football icons, look to be trademark-infringement lawsuits waiting to happen.

You don't have to be an icon artist or developer to appreciate On Display, which lets you change the default icons Windows uses for folders, apps, and common files. Customization tools let you put animated icons on the Desktop, hide or display the arrows on shortcut icons, and change the font and color of text that appears beneath icons. On Display is available as a standalone app (sans the icon-editing suite) for $19.95.

Microangelo works with any system running Win9x to XP. Version 5.5 adds support for XP icons, including icons with transparency, antialiasing, and drop shadows. ▲

Stardock WindowBlinds 3.3



WindowBlinds 3.3
$19.95
Stardock
www.windowblinds.net

Your PC is supposed to be personal, so why is its interface more or less identical to other PCs on the planet? WindowBlinds, a component of Stardock's Object Desktop suite, is a shareware program that gives Windows a fully skinnable user interface. (In case you missed the phenomenon, skins are swappable interfaces that change the look of an application.) When installed, your entire interface—Windows and all your applications—take on a new look.

There are more than 1,500 skins from which to choose. You can explore the selection and download skins from win customize.com. Themes include holidays, movies, nature, and television shows. Essentially, there's a theme for every style, from the elegant to the gauche. You can even install a skin that makes your PC's interface resemble another OS, such as BeOS or Mac OS.

Installing a new theme from the Web is a no-fuss process that takes just seconds; just use your browser to download a theme and activate it in WindowBlinds. You can specify different skins for different applications, thus using several themes at a time.

WinXP offers its own skin functions, but these only work with applications made to support them. WindowBlinds' effects work with most any application, even older apps that aren't theme-aware. The effects work with Win98/Me/NT/2000/XP.

Although some system-wide modifications can wreak havoc with other programs on your system, WindowBlinds played nicely with all the applications I tried it with. If there's a problem, you can deactivate it for certain apps. WindowBlinds isn't compatible with (and is automatically deactivated for) a small handful of applications, including ICQ and Adobe Illustrator.

Overall, the program does a thorough job of overhauling a PC's interface, and although WindowBlinds isn't necessarily useful, it is fun and easy to use, not to mention a great way to make your PC a lot more personal. ▲

CPU Ranking: 0 = Absolutely Worthless 2.5 = Absolutely Average 5 = Absolutely Perfect